



UPDATE

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Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048, (212) 432-5707, for the purpose of providing current information on New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context.

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Analysis of the African Burial Ground Archaeological Materials

Warren R. Perry, Ph.D.

Introduction

The African Burial Ground Project is a multi-disciplinary scientific project composed of complementary natural and social science teams with expertise in the African diaspora. A major goal of our research is to analyze our related materials, to more accurately and holistically, reconstruct and interpret the everyday lives of those African ancestors interred in the African Burial Ground. This collaborative effort provides a contextual understanding of the first generation of African Americans in New York City.

As Associate Director of Archaeology for the Project, I am responsible for analyzing and interpreting the archaeological materials. These materials will be interpreted within the context of the four basic research questions for the project: **1)** What are the cultural and geographical roots of the individuals interred in the African Burial Ground? **2)** What was the physical quality of life for Africans enslaved in New York City during the colonial period and how was it different from the quality of life in their African homeland? **3)** What biological characteristics and cultural traditions remained unchanged and which were transformed during the creation of African American society and culture? **4)** What were the modes of resistance and how were they creatively used to resist oppression and to forge a new African American culture?

The archaeological analysis and interpretation of the African Burial Ground materials is just getting underway. The major thrust of my efforts thus far has been directed toward the hiring of new personnel: Len Bianchi, Jean Cerasale, Ruth Mathis, Paula Saunders, Gerry Sawyer and Dr. Jean Howson to assist with the archaeological analysis. This important phase of the project will provide data that are crucial to extend the interpretation of the skeletal remains.

We are now in the descriptive stage of our analysis. This involves differentiating and identifying artifacts from the burial features, including the grave shafts.

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and more!

History is a clock that people use to tell their time of day. It is a compass they use to find themselves on the map of human geography. It tells them where they are, and what they are. --- Dr. John Henrik Clarke



It Takes Patience to Teach

...Thank you so much for teaching my class about the archaeological excavation of the African Burial Ground. The information you presented impressed those I least expected – several of them actually told their parents about your visit! Thank you also for your tolerance – they were not all well behaved, and for that I apologize. We now know that they need to be grouped by twos and threes with direct adult supervision for future presentations (With each experience we learn!). The wealth of information you included in the information folder will provide me with much appreciated hard-to-find bases for many lessons to come. I look forward to visiting the site in the future and wish you strength and vision in your dealings with the powers-that-be.

Beth Cammarata,
Special Ed.
Mt.Pleasant Middle School
Schenectady, N.Y.

A Tool of Learning

HOTEP!...I am on your current mailing list. I am contacting you from a maximum security prison where I am spokesman of a Black studies group. I find your essays entitled African American Beginnings," very informative. I haven't been on your mailing list for a long period of time and I've only received one part of your entire issues. The fall edition of your newsletter featured Part 6 of 6. This is the only part of the series I was blessed to receive. I am asking you to forward me a copy of your entire series. It will serve as a tool for me to convey my message of Black pride, Do for self, and self-help in my effort of building Black self-esteem. Thanks for your time and concern...and may God bless and keep you forever more.

"One-In-Him"
Henry Washington
New York, N.Y.

Good wishes

Several weeks ago I completed the reading of Sam Anderson's book *The Black Holocaust for Beginners*. He included your name with a number of others who are concerned about Black Genocide and Reparations. I sincerely wish you well in your quest to maintain your project...I would appreciate additional information concerning your project and what successes you have had in meeting the goals you established for your plan. May our Ancestors watch over you and protect you in your quests to aid our people.

Karibe Kajuna
Matteson, Illinois

Open Letter to the City Council

In 1991 I became aware of the eminent demise of the African Burial Ground in lower Manhattan and helped organize the community to save that important historical and archaeological resource for all New Yorkers and the generations that will follow. Working toward that goal I became aware and involved in several other such threatened resources in New York. One is the African and Native American cemetery that exists under the Everett P. Martin Playground in Flushing.

Mr. Mandingo Osceola Tshaka first brought the news of this historic resource to me several years ago. He told me of his own research into City records and old newspaper accounts regarding the cemetery and the people who are buried there. He informed me of the fact that in 1936 a children's playground was established over the remains of Africans, Native Americans and perhaps others, with little regard for the sanctity of the burial ground or of the unexplored history that surely must rest there.

The great knowledge that has come to us from the discovery and study of the African Burial Ground has taught us that any such resource must be protected and given adequate study. When these resources are destroyed or obliterated, then all the knowledge they can yield is lost forever. We cannot afford to lose our history in this manner.

...I want to also remind the Council that our City has many rich historical resources, of diverse ethnic groups, that need to be protected through landmark designation. I would bring your attention to the Seneca Village site in what is now Manhattan's Central Park, the old Van Cortlandt cemetery in the Bronx, and the Brooklyn Navy Yard as prominent on the list. I urge you to vote for the discontinuance of the playground on 46th Avenue in Flushing and for its designation as a historic New York City landmark. However, I also make a plea for the study and protection of the other sites I have mentioned and for the Council to take greater steps to protect the diverse history of this City.

State Senator David A. Paterson
29th District, New York, N.Y.

[Ed. note: See page 6 concerning details of the City Council hearing and page 15 for corrections for the last issue of Update)

OPEI welcomes letters but reserves
the right to edit for length or clarity

Archaeological Materials (Continued from Page 1)

To facilitate this task we are compiling an inclusive catalog of the field records. Information from this basic inventory will be entered into a computerized database to structure *provenience* and coffin data. [Ed. note: definitions for italicized words and terms appear on page 14]

We have examined the field record data to begin our *stratigraphic analysis*, and a careful and detailed study is now underway. Analysis of the burial related artifacts will depend on developing precise data on their *provenience*. This information can help us to understand the *relative chronological sequence* of the burials, and the *spatial distribution* of archaeological materials. Presently, we are working with Flatiron Solutions, a computer software company, in restructuring the current database system specifically for African Burial Ground data. For example, new fields are being added to include information on the different coffin attributes and on burial related artifacts.

What follows is a description of some of the major tasks underway at the Foley Square Laboratory, along with some preliminary analysis of the archaeological data. My goal is to provide an update of our progress thus far, and to indicate the kinds of archaeological materials and contexts available for analysis.

Stratigraphy

We are currently examining field records, drawings, elevations and photographs to identify primary and secondary fill deposits in order to select samples for stratigraphic analysis. We have been concentrating on the *non-burial ground related features* which cut into or are cut by burials and multiple burials. Particular attention is being paid to areas of the burial ground where grave markers were



Archaeology team for the analysis of the African Burial Ground artifacts. Standing in back row from left to right: Ruth Mathis, Jean Howson, Jean Cerasale, Tamara Kelly and Warren Perry. Seated in front: Len Bianchi and Paula Saunders. Not pictured: Gerry Sawyer.

Photo credit:
Tamara Jubilee

recovered because it may be possible to determine the 18th century ground surface where they were resting. Such groupings can aid in developing a relative chronology for different areas of the burial ground that can be tied into datable artifacts. Thus far the preliminary stratigraphic analysis has allowed us to make some tentative observations in regard to certain features and certain burials.

Using information from field records, field books and drawings, we are mapping the site precisely. Coordinates and corrected elevations will be entered into a database and supplied to CAD (Computer Aided Design) specialists at Howard. All measurements for every burial will be standardized, then we will be able to plot the Burial Ground in horizontal and vertical space.

Spatial Analysis of Burials

We have begun a horizontal analysis of the burials based on coffin shapes, burial orientation, based on the four cardinal directions, sex and age differences, and their relationship to one another and burial ground features. An understanding of the social uses of space will contribute to an understanding of the active role Africans played in creating a social identity or identities in the 18th century and how these changed through time. Several kinds of diversity are evident among the 427 burials.

There are a total of 314 individuals on the preliminary demographic lists whose sex and age can be determined. Of these 89 are adult males representing 28% of the total, 73 are adult females representing 23% of the total, and 152 are sub-adults (less than 16 years old) representing 49% of the total. Age and sex do not appear to be important for burial location. Individuals of all ages and both sexes are distributed throughout the entire burial ground population.

Among the 427 individuals recovered from the African Burial Ground are 401 individuals representing 94% of the total buried with coffins while 26 individuals, representing 6% of the total were interred without coffins. The majority of the individuals without coffins (23) seem to be located north of a row of 48 features aligned along an east/west axis. These square-shaped features might indicate some kind of boundary that demarcated sacred from secular space, perhaps coinciding with the original property lines shown on 18th century maps of the burial ground. It should be mentioned that in many parts of Africa individuals are often buried away from others or in a manner different than others because of particular circumstances surrounding their death. For instance, deaths by lightning, suicide, childbirth and people who died in battle require different mortuary treatment. We do have at least one case of a double

burial with a woman cradling an infant in her right arm suggesting death in childbirth or soon thereafter. This burial, however, is not separated from the general burial population.

We have distinguished three basic coffin shapes: hexagonal, tapered, and rectangular. There are also 147 individuals representing 34% of the total burial population whose coffin shapes remain indeterminate. Of the 254 coffins with discernable shapes, 27 representing 10% of the sample are tapered, 33 representing 13% of the sample are rectangular, and 194 representing 77% of the sample are hexagonal (See Table 1).

Table 1 — Coffin Shapes

Tapering	27
Hexagonal	194
Rectangular	33
No Coffin	26
Cannot tell shape	147
Total:	427

All burials are extended and most, 419 representing 98%, are oriented east-west with heads lying west and feet east. There is some variation and diversity in hand and arm positions (flexed, arms crossed, at sides, across pelvis, etc.), but most arms seem to be at sides. There are 6 individuals representing .014% of the total with north/south burials with all heads lying south except for one. There are only 4 burials representing .009% of the total who are oriented east/west and whose heads are lying east (See Table 2).

Table 2 — Body Orientation

No/So. Burials	Head Direction	Age/Sex
B 52	North	Indeterminate
B237	South	Indeterminate
B264	?	Indeterminate
B309	South	Indeterminate
B365	South	Adult female
B383	South	Sub-adult

Table 2 (cont.)

East/West Burials	Head Direction	Age/Sex
B312	East	Sub-adult
B323	East	Adult male
B183	East	Sub-adult
B392	East	Indeterminate

These preliminary analysis are provocative and raise some important questions. What kind of grave goods are these *anomalous individuals* associated with? Do any of these individuals show skeletal evidence of pathologies? How different or similar are the mortuary patterns at the African Burial Ground to those of other 18th and 19th century African descendant cemeteries, or Native American cemeteries and even Euro-American burial grounds?

A precursory review of the ethnographic and archaeological sources indicate that although there is significant variability in African grave location, form, and structure, many graves were oval or round in plan, with concave bottoms and covered with stone slabs, or "cairns." Most of the African Burial Ground graves had flat bottoms to accommodate the coffins. It remains to be seen if we can determine whether the grave shafts of those individuals buried without coffins were rectangular or oval/round. As our research progresses we will be seeking cultural explanations for this and other relevant variations that are certain to arise.

Coffin Wood Samples

Many burials show evidence of coffin wood remains mostly in the form of organic wood stains. Wood samples, frozen for preservation, are now being analyzed by the Project's conservators. Samples are being *thin sectioned* to identify genus and/or species, and surface treatment such as shellac, resin, or paint pigments.

This can help us to analyze the different coffin wood types and see if they correlate with other variables such as

sex, age, coffin size, etc. When possible we are also testing wood samples from different parts of the same coffins to see if there are coffins constructed from different types of woods. Thus far, of the 24 wood samples that have been identified, 9 are cedar, 6 are pine, 3 are spruce, 6 are unidentifiable and 1 is both spruce and pine.

There are 5 coffin wood samples suspected of containing some kind of colorant or other coating materials (See Table 3). We have only begun analysis on B159. Microscopic examination of coffin wood from B159 revealed no layer of pigment and efflorescence tests (testing for salt crystals on a surface due to evaporation of salt laden water) showed no evidence of a binder present. X-ray diffraction analysis (for determining the chemical composition) will be run on soil samples from the burial matrix (grave shaft directly above the coffin) of these coffins to see if the coloration is staining from local clays in the depositional soils.

Table 3 — Coffin Wood Samples with Possible Surface Colorant

Burial	Age/Sex	Coffin Shape	Head Direction
B134	Adult Female	Hexagon	West
B159	Adult Female	Hexagon	West
B183	Sub-Adult	Hexagon	East
B213	Adult Female	Hexagon	West
B313	Adult Male	Hexagon	West

Ecofact Analysis

We are currently compiling soil sample data to identify a 25% sample (approximately 217 samples) from the 868 burial related soil samples. These samples were collected from significant locations within the grave pits and can provide numerous kinds of useful information.

For example, botanical remains from coffin lid soil samples can yield evidence of burial rituals like floral tributes used for burial offerings. Stomach samples can provide evidence of food residues indicating dietary patterns (often characteristic of distinct ethnic groups),

while *thoracic samples* can reveal pathological organisms yielding evidence of health, disease and nutrition. Finally, *sacrum samples* can indicate parasite infestations, pathological organisms and calcified organic material yielding evidence of overall health, disease, and nutrition at the time of death. These soil samples will be selected according to demographic characteristics and other variables like coffin shape, and burial location.

Data from the soil samples outside of the coffin will be used to obtain information on the season of interment and the environmental conditions at the time of the burial. Soil samples can yield information on the *taphonomic processes* that acted upon the site and the skeletal remains. For instance, chemical analysis of soil samples from burial pits will provide data on pH (acid level) and macroscopic analysis of insect remains providing information on the physical degeneration of the bone. Finally, soil sample analysis may allow us to identify "natural" or cultural factors responsible for post-mortem movement of burials.

Artifact Identification and Analysis

Presently, there are 450-500 artifacts from within the coffins already conserved and approximately 150 that remain to be conserved. This excludes coffin nails, of which there are thousands; which will all be X-rayed. In addition, there are artifacts from the grave shafts that must be studied to see if they were part of grave offerings or simply material from the grave fill. The majority of the artifacts are shroud pins and coffin nails. Others include coffin hardware, screws, tacks, buttons, copper-alloy rings, coins, glass beads, cowrie shells, at least one musket ball, pipes, shells, ceramics, and other organic materials such as textiles.



Fig. 1 Previously identified as a pendant (Update Issue No. 9), researchers believe this object may be an ear-bob worn on a leather thong by a child five to seven years old. Photo credit: Otto Jerome Edwards

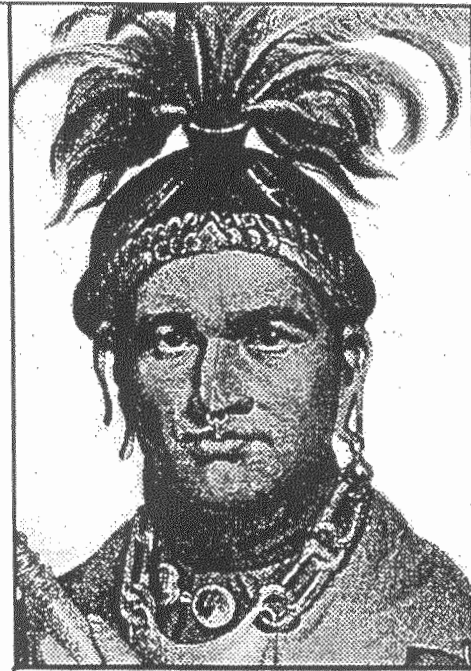


Fig. 2 Complanter, a Seneca war chief, wore a similar type of adornment, referred to as a nose bob when he posed for this portrait in New York City in 1796. Photo Credit: 500 Nations.

Many of these artifacts, like the stone-ware sherds associated with B5 need to be investigated for evidence of motifs suggestive of African origin or inspiration.

The historical documents and the preliminary dating of the artifacts indicate an overall 18th century date for the African Burial Ground. Standard artifact identification manuals, artifacts from various museum and university collections, and published site reports from the same time period can all be used to help identify probable African "donor" populations and to date and identify artifacts. In addition, ethnographic and historical sources will be investigated around questions of where, when and how specific objects were produced, decorated, and their functional and contextual use as well as their cultural significance. Particular attention will be paid to questions of context, artifactual distribution and associated objects.

One of the most intriguing artifacts from the African Burial Ground is the

ear-drop shaped object that we have referred to as an "ear bob" associated with Burial 254, a sub-adult (5-7 years old) buried in a hexagonal coffin whose head is lying west (See Fig. 1). The skeletal evidence indicates that this child suffered from a variety of pathologies. Preliminary research has disclosed that similar objects have been recovered from many 1820 Native American burials from Michigan, and are common throughout the Upper Great Lakes region where they are referred to as "bangles" or "tinkling cones." We have also found a picture of a 1790s Native American Seneca "chief" from New York using this object as a nose bob (See Fig 2).

The manufacturing process of this object has been identified as sand cast and testing revealed that it is virtually all silver. Stylistically, this object does not resemble European or North American casting techniques of the period. In addition to the bob, a small fragment of organic material was recovered from the pedestal associated with the bob

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AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT PROFILES

Michael L. Blakey, Ph.D.

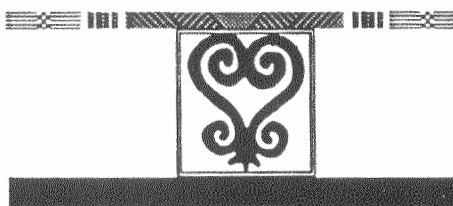
In a continuing effort to provide Update readers with the biographical background of the various individuals currently involved in the African Burial Ground Project, in this issue we feature Dr. Edna Green Medford, Associate Director for History.

Edna Medford is a Virginia native whose academic career has been dedicated to a study of African American life and labor, mainly of the antebellum and postbellum upper south. When asked why she chose this particular area of study as a profession, Dr. Medford commented, "I grew up in a rural tidewater Virginia community where elegant old mansions and the remains of once expansive plantations lined the James River. Little was ever said publicly about a historic African American presence there, but I knew there must have been a significant black contribution to the region. The more I studied the community's history, the greater understanding I had of present conditions. Questions raised out of personal curiosity eventually led to a life-long commitment to professional historical research."

Dr. Medford received a Bachelor of Science degree from Hampton Institute, an M.A. degree from the University of Illinois, Urbana and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland at College Park where she studied with distinguished historian



Dr. Edna Greene Medford
Associate Director for History



Professor Ira Berlin. The title of her 1987 doctoral dissertation was "The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in a Diversified Economy: Virginia's Lower Peninsula, 1860-1900."

Her interests are far reaching. As an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Howard University, Dr. Medford teaches colonial American history and the African diaspora. Her studies and publications also include the American Post-Revolutionary/ Early national period, Jacksonian Democracy, the antebellum south, African American/Native American relations, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, and African Americans in World War II.

She is sought as an advisor on many of these topics, including her periodic on-site commentary in C-Span's coverage of the reenactments of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 and as a contributor to the Arts and Entertainment Channel's programs on Frederick Douglass, Women at War, and Antebellum Slavery. According to Dr. Medford, "if history as a discipline is to be made more accessible to the American public, teaching must extend beyond the halls of the academy. The historian must embrace the opportunity to lecture to community-based organizations and to work with them in an effort to promote the study and understanding of history." Hence, she lectures widely, serving as historian/consultant to many local, community-based, and African American professional organizations whose primary aim is to "build bridges between the various segments of the Black diasporic community."

As an Associate Director, Edna Medford is the African Burial Ground Project's senior historian and is responsible for coordinating a team of about a dozen specialists and staff at Howard, New York, and other parts of the United States.



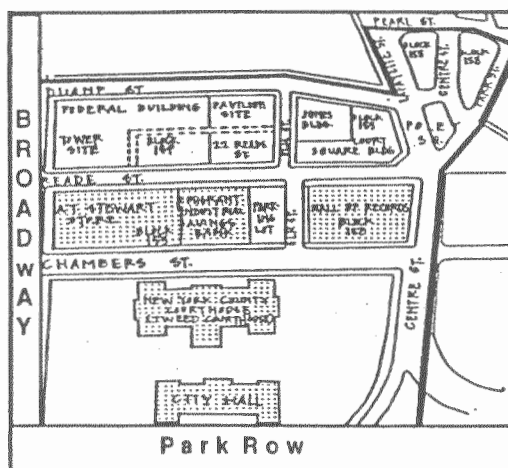
Public hours for visiting Howard University's Cobb Laboratory in Washington D.C. are Fridays from 10 - 11 a.m. or Saturdays between 10 - 12 noon. To schedule an appointment please call:

(202) 806-5252.



African Burial Ground Update

❑ **GSA to Conduct Ground Studies at African Burial Ground Site.** In preparation for the exterior memorialization at the African Burial Ground National Historic Site, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has announced that it will begin conducting ground studies at the site in order to determine if there are any limitations for future memorialization plans or reinterment of the 427 human remains currently under study at Howard University. Work will begin sometime in the week of Monday, March 10th and conclude the following week. A representative from OPEI will be at the site to respond to questions.



❑ **THE FEBRUARY 25, 1993 ANNIVERSARY OF THE LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND AND COMMONS HISTORIC DISTRICT** reminds us that this area of lower Manhattan, bordered by Broadway, Park Row, Centre, Duane Streets, including the small area of Foley Square, encompasses much of the early history of New York.

For much of the 17th century, the Commons was considered a desolate area. Some areas were used as a pasture while its northern end eventually became the site of the African Burial Ground (Block 154). Following transition from Dutch to British rule, in 1664, the Commons gradually began to assume the image of a town. The City's first almshouse was erected in 1736 in the approximate area where City Hall stands today. By the Revolutionary War, City Hall Park had become the scene of military drills, and contained a number of structures including a soldiers barrack, a prison and an executioner's scaffold, all in close proximity to the Almshouse. Surveyed as early as 1785 "for regulating it into 5 acre lots" the character of the Commons soon gave way to commercial and residential development; the result of the City's rapid growth after the War.

RELATED ITEMS:

❑ **CITY COUNCIL DELIBERATES 19th CENTURY AFRICAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN CEMETERY.** On Thursday, January 30, 1997, Resolution 1985 was submitted to the City Council by

Councilwoman Julia Harrison. The result of a long campaign spearheaded by Mandingo Osceola Tshaka, the Resolution calls for the New York City Parks Department to discontinue operation of the Everett P. Martin Playground at 46th Avenue at 164th Street in Flushing, Queens. The Resolution favors restoration of the former "Colored Cemetery" that served as a burial ground for African and Native Americans in Flushing. It is believed that approximately 1,000 remains were interred at the site between 1840-1898. Based on a documentary study of the site, it appears that 62% of the interred were of African descent, 34 % were unidentified, and more than half were children under the age of five. Like the African Burial Ground in lower Manhattan, the Colored Cemetery of Flushing was established because Africans and Native Americans were barred from burial in European churchyards or cemeteries. Town officials decided to erect a park at the site in 1936. Tshaka's testimony before the Council described the destruction of tombstones and burials when playground equipment was installed. He also recounted newspaper headlines exclaiming "Bones Galore" and summarized articles citing the sale of pennies taken from graves by construction workers.

Michael J. Brown, Jr., a representative for the New York City Parks Department, was the lone dissenter to restoration of the burial ground. Citing the availability of funds earmarked for repair of the park, Brown argued that the loss of the park would deprive the community of a valuable resource. Councilwoman Harris challenged his claim however, noting the absence of supportive statistical data. She added that the park was no longer being used by community residents because of its commercial location and improper use by teenagers as a "hang-out." Harris cited nearby Flushing Meadows Park as a viable alternative. The hearing concluded with Brown agreeing to listen to community concerns and suggestions and to provide data to support his claim. A full vote by Council Members will take place in the near future.

❑ **BEFORE CENTRAL PARK: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SENECA VILLAGE.** Seneca Village was populated by African Americans, Irish and Germans from 1825 until it was destroyed to make way for the development of Central Park in the late 1850s. N.Y. Historical Society Curator of Education Grady Turner and Museum Educator Cynthia Copeland, a former OPEI Public Educator, have developed an exhibition that reclaims this forgotten community through creatively mounted newspaper accounts, church and tax records, deeds and wills. On display from January 29th to August 10th, 1997, at the New York Historical Society, the hours are Wednesday through Sunday from noon to 5:00 p.m. The Society is located at 2 West 77th Street at Central Park West. Admission fee: \$5 adults, \$3 for children. Call (212) 873-3400 for further details. — E.B.



ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?

Please submit names and/or corrections to
OPEI, 6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239
New York, New York 10048

MODERN MYTHS OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

**Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D. and
Jean Howson, Ph.D.**

Within the last few years, a number of media articles and documentaries have attempted to address the events and controversy surrounding the African Burial Ground. While many have had varying degrees of success, others have created and perpetuated myths about the site. This article, the first in an ongoing series, will address these myths by presenting documented facts and their sources

The excavation of the New York African Burial Ground has resulted in a resurrected interest in the history of Africans living in colonial New Amsterdam and early New York. Since the 1991-1992 excavation of this long-neglected site while the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) built a federal office building at 290 Broadway, more than 500 newspaper and magazine articles have been published recounting both the history of the burial ground and political events surrounding the project. Five documentary films have been produced depicting the history of Africans in New York as well as the contemporary struggle for the preservation and interpretation of this now city and national landmark.

The recovery and re-telling of the historical "facts" about the African presence in early New York, and the construction of contemporary "facts" about the history of the project, both involve problems of interpretation and collective memory.

Myth #1:



**Human remains at the
African Burial Ground
were "accidentally discovered"
by construction workers**

A number of "myths" about the project have emerged and are propagated in each re-telling of the narrative.

This peculiarity of collective memory is not unique to the African Burial Ground Project, but is inherent in any chronicle of events involving controversy.

One "myth" is that the first human bones found at the site were discovered by construction workers in the initial phase of construction of the 290 Broadway federal office tower.

The second serious misunderstanding or myth, related to the first, is that human remains were discovered "accidentally" at the site.

The scenario of accidental discovery apparently makes a good story, since it is repeated in virtually every media presentation on the project. In fact, there was nothing accidental at all about the unearthing of human remains in the Spring of 1991.

Excavation was undertaken at that time by archaeologists for the specific purpose of looking for such remains, and the location chosen was quite deliberate. Remains were uncovered in a spot targeted by archaeologists as the corner of "Republican Alley," a small street which had been laid out atop the burial ground in 1795. It was considered a likely spot for preservation of burials, and was therefore singled out for the archaeological testing.

The General Services Administration had ordered the testing in compliance with federal law (specifically, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966) designed to protect important sites from destruction.

If testing indicated the existence of important remains, plans



would then need to be made to protect them or carefully excavate them prior to the construction project.

In order to explore beneath pavement and recent "fill" (fill is rubble and soils used to level up an area) at an urban archaeological site, mechanical excavation equipment such as a backhoe is used. At the corner of Republican Alley, the archaeologists hired by GSA had a backhoe remove the pavement and the fill just beneath it.

Next, the machine scraped down the soil as archaeologists monitored closely for the presence of historic remains. The archaeologists noticed human bones almost immediately, and ceased excavation. The New York Times reported on June 15, 1991 that human remains had been found at the site, but that it was not yet clear whether they were from intact burials. That is, at first it was considered possible that the graves had all been disturbed before, resulting in bones being mixed together and taken out of their original contexts.

Archaeologists soon resumed digging by hand in order to find out whether graves in this portion of the African Burial Ground were in fact preserved intact. They were, and as we now know intact burials excavated at the site ultimately numbered more than four hundred.

Human remains at the African Burial Ground were not "discov-

ered" by construction workers nor were they unearthed by accident. On the contrary, they were deliberately sought and excavated by professional archaeologists hired by a government agency

charged with making every effort to insure that "accidental" discoveries do not happen. [Ed. note: For additional commentary concerning media coverage of the African Burial Ground see Community Voices page 10]

PRIMARY REFERENCE DOCUMENTS FOR RESEARCHING THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

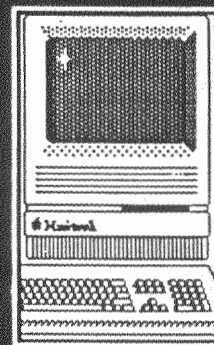
A Stage 1A Cultural Resource Survey of the Proposed Foley Square Project in the Borough of Manhattan
by Marjorie Ingle, Jean Howson and Edward S. Rutsch,
S.O.P.A. of Historic Conservation & Interpretation, Inc.
Newton, New Jersey 07860. Rev., May 1990.

Research Design for Archaeological, Historical & Bio-anthropological Investigations of the African Burial Ground (Broadway Block) New York, N.Y. Prepared for the General Services Administration, Region 2, by Howard University, Washington, DC. 20059 and John Milner Associates, Inc., April 1993.

Minutes of the Steering Committee of the African Burial Ground of the City of New York, Schomburg Center, 515 Malcolm X Blvd., New York, NY. June 1993 - July 1994.

Memorialization of the African Burial Ground: The Federal Steering Committee Final Recommendations to the Administrator, General Services Administrator and the U.S. Congress, August 6, 1993.

REMINDER

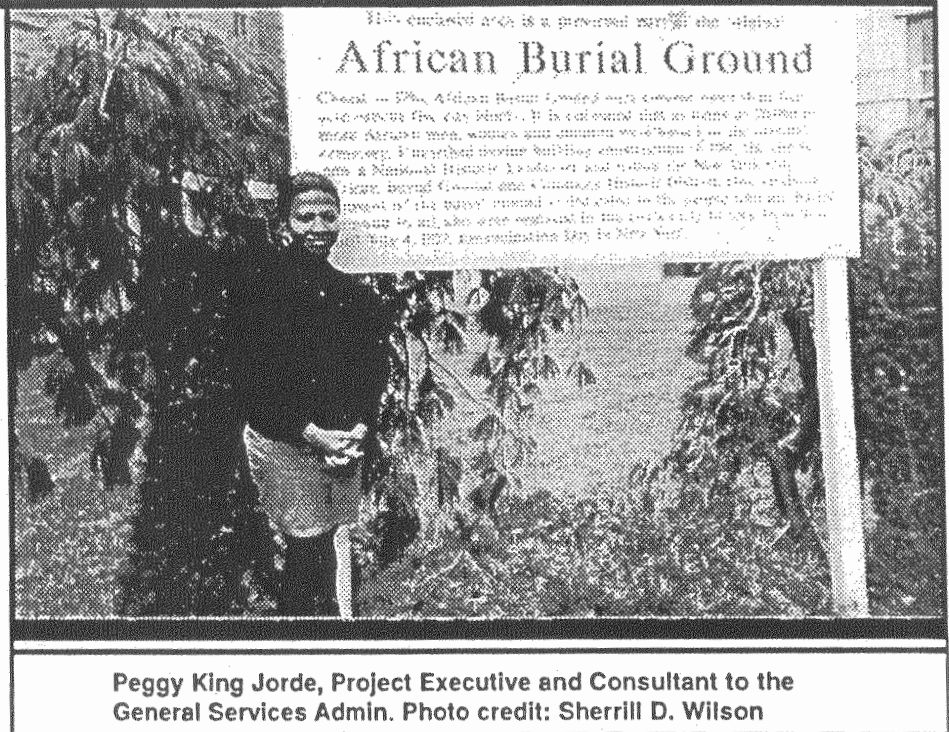


The web site address for Questions and Answers on the African Burial Ground published by OPEI is: <http://www.afri.net.com.net/7/abg.html>. Currently being updated, Q&A still provides useful information about the African Burial Ground. It can be downloaded for frequent reference. Coming soon: The African Burial Ground Web Site.

MEMORIALIZATION OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND: An Interview with Peggy King Jorde

Donna Harden Cole

As part of the memorialization process for the African Burial Ground, Ms. Peggy King Jorde, Project Executive and Consultant to the General Services Administration, is coordinating the upcoming design competitions for this historic site. Ms. Jorde is the former Executive Director of the Federal Advisory Steering Committee whose two year charter ended in 1994, but not before recommendations were submitted to Congress regarding the community's concern and interest in memorializing this national and historic landmark.



of the New York City African Burial Ground which was uncovered in 1991 when the General Services Administration (GSA) began plans for the construction of a government office tower and pavilion.

DHC: As the African Burial Ground Project Executive, can you tell us about your tasks and goals in relation to memorialization of the African Burial Ground site?

PKJ: My tasks and goals for the memorialization of the African Burial Ground site will include coordination of two design competitions that will facilitate and result in a final design that best honors the lives of those individuals buried there.

Meaningful physical reminders are what we use to keep ourselves close to what is important to us. This design will be critical to speaking our truth as a community.

DHC: How will these proposed design competitions work?

PKJ: Currently, we are refining the details of the solicitation documents for the Interpretive Center and the memorial site. The Request for Proposals (RFP) for both projects will outline design criteria and professional qualification requirements expected of the designers or design teams chosen for this special endeavor.

Ms. King Jorde, having served as special advisor to former Mayor David N. Dinkins and a project planner in the Mayor's Office of Construction, was appointed to serve as consultant and Project Executive for the memorialization in mid-October 1996. In this capacity, she is charged with managing the entire memorialization project. This includes coordinating the completion of the Interpretive Center, the exterior memorial, and reinvestment activities.

Although on a tight schedule, Ms. Jorde was able to take some time to share some thoughts in an interview about this very important process of honoring the ancestors

GSA and I are working with two distinct panels for each competition. Panel members are African American experts and scholars who come from a variety of disciplines including the arts, history, architecture, etc. They are charged with making recommendations to the GSA regarding the selection of a design and design team.

Particularly where the Interpretive Center is concerned, design teams will be encouraged because the project will require a variety of disciplines. Teams will be asked to create an environment which can embrace the importance of the rediscovery of this African Burial Ground population through an exhibit design that includes multi-media capabilities, lighting, sound, etc.

The Interpretive Center environment will serve as an important facilitator for telling the story of the African Burial Ground, historically and scientifically. In brief, the competitions will work this way. After a period of solicitation through periodicals, a short list of five design teams for each competition will be determined.

Each team will be given a stipend and asked to develop a concept for review by a panel of professionals, the descendant community, and technical evaluation. An awardee will be determined for the Interpretive Center as well as for the Memorial Design. Awardees will be contracted for design development, fabrication, and installation of the winning designs.

DHC: Will there be community input?

PKJ: Yes, indeed. We will coordinate community participation during concept development. This is an extremely critical part of the design process.

DHC: What information can you provide to our readers regarding participation in the upcoming memorialization competition?

PKJ: We expect to see participation from historically Black colleges. We encourage those interested to start reviewing their areas of expertise. Networking is encouraged as well. Plans are being made for a pre-bid conference. The purpose of this conference is to facilitate interaction and exchange among potential competition hopefuls. It is the government's effort to encourage networking and teaming.

DHC: What sort of details need to be worked out in order for reinterment to take place?

PKJ: Although not etched in stone, considerations are being given to coordinating with historically African American institutions, fraternities, sororities, and numerous other organizations to commemorate the death or home going of our ancestors. This may include youth groups participating in the designs and building of coffins for each ancestral individual. Eight years ago in March, my family commemorated my

father's home going by designating my brother and I to design and build with our own hands my father's coffin. I feel that in the same tradition, this will serve as a meaningful opportunity for contributing to memorialization of our ancestors. West African participation is also being targeted.

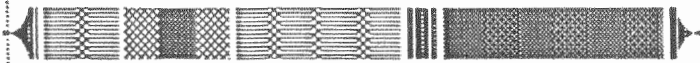
DHC: Will memorialization coincide with reinterment of the remains, tentatively scheduled for the year 2000?

PKJ: I am hopeful that a memorialization ceremony, reinterment, and the installation of the memorial design will happen in a timely manner. There are a number of project stages that are being thoughtfully reviewed and expected to be carefully coordinated. While the Interpretive Center will serve to enlighten visitors about New York's African history, and relate the extensive archaeological research, the memorial design is expected to recognize the burial site as sacred and a place where visitors may go to acknowledge and honor the lives of our African ancestors buried there.

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To hear a recorded message that provides details, dates and instructions regarding the upcoming design competition please call 212-264-6949

COMMUNITY VOICES



Compiled by Chadra D. Pittman

Since the African Burial Ground's recovery, there have been many media reports documenting the historic site. In this issue of Update we asked our readers to comment on the media's role in handling the African Burial Ground.

Barbara Muniz

Founder/ Pres. of the Black American Roots Society

To look at the media's coverage in the very beginning of the project, the information was primarily geared towards the scientific significance of the project and not enough was written regarding the historical contributions of African people to New York. As time progressed, the media began to cover information on the African Burial Ground in a more detailed manner; incorporating the historical aspects of the African presence in the articles that were written. History is what makes a story stick. When you can supply dates, times, and significant people with pictures to give a visual glimpse into history this impresses upon the minds of people. I recall an article that the New York Times published. The paper printed a good illustration on how the African Burial Ground looked in the 1700 's and even displayed a drawing of enslaved Africans in the burial ground. This helps a reader conceptualize the history and events. In this last year, there has not been enough media coverage on the burial ground.

If the media doesn't keep this information in the forefront of our consciousness, people have a tendency to believe that everything is OK and that there is nothing to be concerned about. As soon as they feel that we have forgotten about the project, that is when they begin to take things back from us. People must remember that this project came by a struggle. New Yorkers need to accept the fact that New York was heavily involved in the Enslavement Trade and that at one point in time New York City had the second largest population of enslaved Africans in the northern colonies. We need to be mindful that people are quick to put our ancestors on the back burner that is why we must make them a priority and keep that information in the forefront of our consciousness.

Sylvia Bowens,
OPEI Volunteer

I have read only a few news articles on the African Burial Ground in comparison to talking to the growing interest and concerns of storytellers, artists, elders, singers, scholars and the community, who have come together to empower the voices of our ancestors.

The few news articles I have read only discussed the finding of bodies, not of the human beings: carpenters, weavers, farmers and many other skilled persons who lived and died as enslaved Africans in New York City. I feel offended in the way in which the media has ineffectively represented the Africans living in Colonial New York. They don't highlight the personalities and the humanity of the people. The enslavers then and the media then and today, viewed us as property, but what about seeing us as human beings with pains and thoughts?

Dr. Diana Wall, Archaeology Dept., CCNY

I would like to see the African Burial Ground get more exposure in all forms of the media; newspapers as well as television programs. The information on the African Burial Ground is such a wonderful resource that unfortunately, is not widely known. What always gets me is that so few people are aware that the burial ground even exists. I teach a General Anthropology class at CCNY and I always begin with the African Burial Ground Project. Here we have a school located right in New York City, the resting place of the burial ground, and still people, New Yorkers, don't know about the project. It is shocking to me that such a project is not more widely known.

Mikal Muharrar, Scholar/Activist

Some of the established media coverage of the African Burial Ground has been intelligent and even moving. However, the African Burial Ground represents a return of an all but forgotten, buried past; a past this nation has not come to terms with and is in denial about. It represents the return of a history that has been repressed for very immoral yet practical reasons. For these and other reasons, overall media coverage has missed the point almost entirely. It is not that I have high expectations of the media, I don't. In fact, I expect the media to distort and misrepresent reality in general and anything to do with Black people in particular. What I am interested in is how the established media frames the discussion, what questions it asks and does not ask, and how the contradictory legacy of a so-called freedom of some, is being supported by and maintained through the slavery and oppression of others. This legacy is explained away, romanticized or justified through media propaganda masquerading as enlightened journalism.

The African Burial Ground shows that the myth of progress is in fact a myth and that many of the issues and struggles associated with the past are in one form or another, pertinent issues we are still struggling with today. The African Burial Ground demonstrates that those who deny and repress history do not necessarily have the last word. Concerned human beings, especially Black people must do more to frame, manifest and project a still unfolding and unresolved story.



OPEI HONORS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Reading List Compiled by
Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

Shockley, Ann Allen. **Afro American Women Writers (1746-1933): An Anthology and Critical Guide.** Meridian Book/New American Library (1989)



Brown, Hallie Q. **Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction.** New York: Oxford University Press (1988)

Busby, Margaret. **Daughters of Africa.** New York: Ballantine Books (1992)

Dickerson, Richard. "Abstracts of Early Black Manhattanites." **Journal Genealogical & Bibliographical Record** #1, #2, #3 N.P., N.D.

Flexner, Eleanor. **Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States.** Mass.: Harvard Paperback (1959, 1975)

Foner, Phillip S. ed. **Frederick Douglass On Women's Rights.** New York: Da Capo Paperback (1969)

Gurko, Miriam. **The Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Women's Rights Movement.** New York: Shoken Books (1976)

Hymowitz, Carol & Michelle Weissman. **A History of Women In America.** New York: Bantam Books (1976)

Lowenberg, Beth & Ruth Bogin, eds. **Black Women In Nineteenth Century American Life: Their Words, Thoughts and Feelings.** PA: Pennsylvania State University (1976)



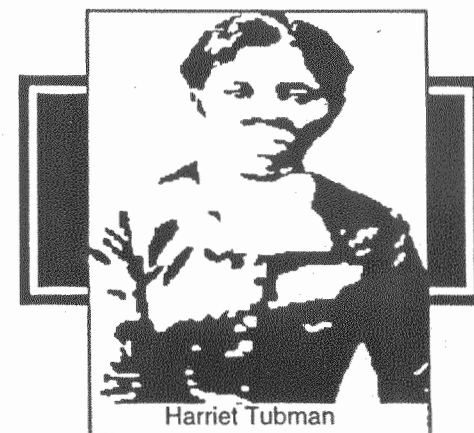
Russell, Sandi. ed. **Render Me My Song: African American Women Writers from Slavery to the Present.** New York: St. Martin's Press (1990)

Sharp, Sandra. **Black Women For Beginners.** New York: Writers and Readers Pub., Inc. (1993)

Sherr, Lynn & J. Kazickas Susan B. Anthony **Slept Here: A Guide to American Women's Landmarks.** New York: Time Books/Random House (1976)

Sterling, Dorothy, ed. **We Are Your Sisters: Black Women In The Nineteenth Century.** New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1984)

Weatherford, Doris. **American Women's History: An A-Z of People, Organizations, Issues and Events.** Prentice Hall General Reference (1994)



Wood Hill, Marilyn. **Their Sister's Keepers: Prostitution In New York City, 1830-1870.** Berkeley: University of Calif. Press (1993)

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Scott, and Barbara Smith, Eds. **But Some Of Us Are Brave.** New York: The Feminist Press, City University of New York, (1982).

Yellin, Jean Fagan. **Women & Sisters: The Anti-Slavery Feminists In American Culture.** New Haven: Yale Univ. Press (1989)



Archaeological Materials **(Continued from Page 5)**

and was subsequently identified as leather or hide, suggesting that the bob may have been supported by a leather strip. Furthermore, a small silver fragment resembling a straight wire which may have been part of the jewelry assemblage was recovered. Research on this and other artifacts will continue.

Conclusion: Cemeteries, African Captivity and Multivalency

I will conclude this update with a brief discussion of the theoretical framework that will be used to interpret the artifacts from the African Burial Ground. Cemeteries represent ritual and sacred space — locations where social contradictions are articulated. Burial patterns are structured through symbolically meaningful codes which can mask or otherwise distort social relationships. Material objects associated with graves have no inherent meaning. They acquire meaning only in a cultural context. Therefore, in interpreting the African Burial Ground artifacts and related materials, emphasis must be on context. Coins on the eye lids, conch shells, an ox-shoe at the foot of burials, and ceramics on the coffin lid are all manifestations of these symbolic cultural codes whose meanings extend beyond the functional aspects of the specific artifacts. This is always true in situations of cultural hegemony generally and particularly in the case of African captivity in the Americas where Africans were brought into a very different and oppressive sociocultural milieu as commodities.

In colonial New York City there were a variety of social agents and their alliances, differences and divisions, make the social and cultural field of the African diaspora quite complex. Searching for objects of African origin quickly leads to the complex field of colonial relations in

which objects rarely take on simple one-to-one relations with social groups. Indeed, most categories of material culture involving a similar range of objects, were used by European, African and Native Americans, though quite often in strikingly different ways. We refer to this condition as multivalency. Multivalency exists when an object or set of objects takes on strikingly different meanings for different social groups, with dominating groups often totally ignorant of the meaning system of subordinated groups. It is these multivalencies that, as much as Africanisms, Europeanisms, or Nativisms mark the color line. Artifacts are dynamic and must be viewed simultaneously as the means of production, objects of production, and the basis for social identification and struggle. Hence, colonial artifacts can no longer be associated with a single social group, or assigned a single unique meaning.

For instance, objects like the quartz crystals found in a number of the African Burial Ground burials, although not unique to African American sites, nor exemplifying discernible African stylistic characteristics, possess special meanings for African Americans beyond reminiscence. Such things were and are used to create African American culture, rooting people in a shared African past; as a result, they were and are fundamental to the sanity of African Americans. All too often multivalent objects are either placed in miscellaneous categories, discarded, or given the interpretation used by the dominant culture. The daunting task of analyzing and interpreting the archaeological materials from the African Burial Ground is to capture these meanings and their social relations, and to discover alternative understandings and practices associated with them. We enthusiastically accept the challenge.



GLOSSARY

anomalous individuals -- those with characteristics very different from the majority

cairns -- stone slabs

demographic characteristics -- basically age and sex

ecofact analysis -- an item that is natural rather than made by people, but is used by people, such as plants or seeds

multiple or double burial -- more than one individual interred together

non-burial ground related features -- parts of the site which are not associated with its use as the African Burial Ground, such as dumping areas from the nearby pottery makers or wells and privies from a later period which sometimes cut into graves

provenience -- the exact location of an item at an archaeological site

relative chronological sequence -- a time sequence for graves, from older to later, when specific dates are not known

sacrum samples -- samples from the area of the intestines

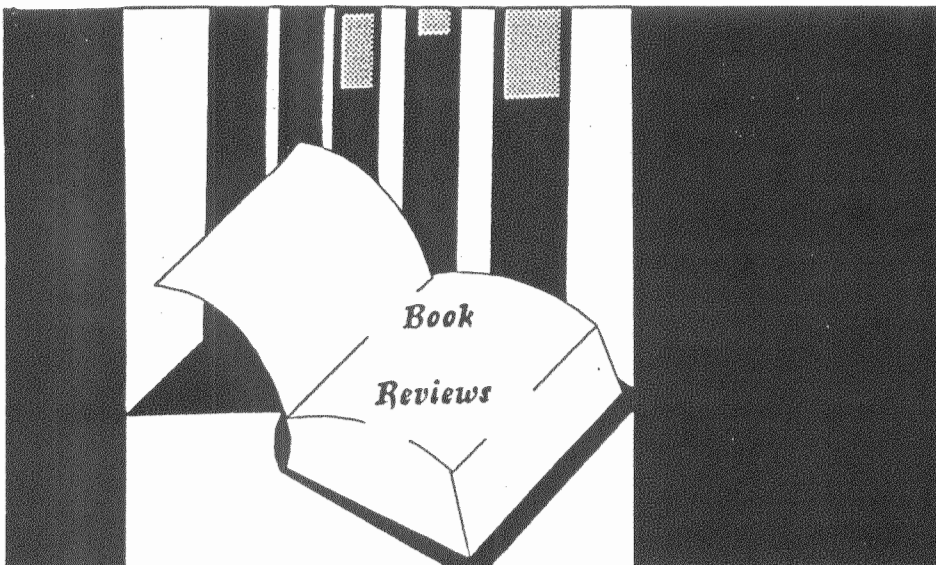
stratigraphic analysis -- analysis of the vertical relationship of deposits

spatial distribution -- how graves are arranged in space over the site

taphonomic processes -- processes which affect remains during the time they are in the ground such as erosion, disturbance by later digging, covering over with fill, or the actions of soil acids or bacteria which cause bone to decompose

thin sectioned -- When objects are cut into very small sizes and placed under a microscope

thoracic samples -- samples from the chest cavity area



Book: In Small Things
Forgotten: The
Archaeology of Early
American Life
Publisher: Anchor/Doubleday
1996 \$11.00
Author: James Deetz
Reviewer: Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

This 1996 expanded and revised version of the 1977 James Deetz classic work In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life, has been eagerly anticipated for more than a decade. The study of historical archaeological sites and their artifacts have made significant contributions to our understanding of the American past.

The 1977 version has become a standard "text" for students and teachers of historical archaeology. The introductory chapter to both versions, provides a general overview of the historical archaeological field, and its methodology.

Thumbnail sketches of several

17th through 19th century eastern U.S. archaeology sites are used by Deetz to illustrate the wealth of knowledge that may be gleaned from the marriage of history and archaeology. Deetz's text examines the material culture categories of ceramics, foodways, house construction, and mortuary arts, as they are used to provide information about the past lives of Anglo- and African Americans.

The primary difference between the two versions is that a chapter entitled "The African American Past" is included in the 1996 edition. This chapter elaborates on what was begun in the 1977 version in the chapter "Parting Ways." This additional chapter is a welcome inclusion that provides background on what has been done in terms of the excavation of cabins used by enslaved Africans and other African American sites, in the effort to illuminate the contributions of the African presence in the American past.



Corrections:

1. The Winter 1996-97 issue of Update should have been identified as Volume 2, Number 1.
2. In Part 2 of the Howard University interview, osteological asst. Kenya Shujaa's last name was misspelled as "Surya."
3. The article "Am I Not A Woman and a Sister: New York African American Women and The American Abolitionist Movement, contains an error at the bottom of the first paragraph. The phrase "race, sex and gender, should have read "race, class and gender."

In The Next Issue of Update:

- o Laws Regulating Preservation of Historical Burial Grounds.
- o The African Burial Ground Project and the U.S. Customs Lab.
- o 1997 OPEI Youth Symposium.

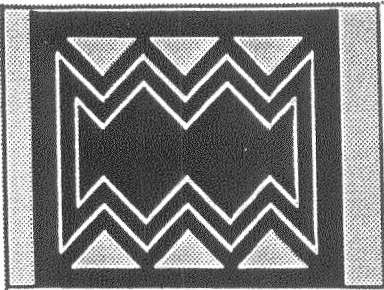
OPEI MINI-CALENDAR

April 9th and 10th – Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Dr. Warren R. Perry, and Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson present a lecture about the African Burial Ground at Central Connecticut State University

April 19 – Volunteer Training.
Call 212-432-5707 to RSVP.

May 24 – OPEI
Open House Event.

June 21 – African Burial Ground
Film Festival



ADDRESS

